

### The New Amberola Graphic

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## Curiosity

"What'd He Call It?"

by Martin F. Bryan

In the Teens and early Twenties, the leading proponents of Hawaiian music on records were Helen Louise and Frank Ferera (sometimes spelled "Ferrera"), and later, Frank Ferera and Anthony Franchini. They made the rounds of all major and most minor recording companies, frequently waxing the same selections for the different labels.

One popular title in their repertoire, which had several recording sessions, was "Pua Carnation" ("Carnation Flower," according to the Columbia catalogue). So, when Aeolian-Vocalion switched to lateral recording in 1920, it was natural that they would want to add the popular novelties to their new catalogue. We can only imagine the following conversation:

Engineer: What'd you say that last selection was called, Mr. Ferera?

Ferera: "Pua Carnation"

Engineer: (Hmmm...this fella must be from Maine. "Poor Carnation" it is!)



... and that's the way it got labeled! It is unknown whether or not the labeling was eventually corrected, but at least through the 1923 Vocalion catalogue "Pua Carnation" remained "Poor Carnation." Ayuh!

### Bettini's Suicide Attempt

#### by Robert Feinstein & John Levin

While Thomas Edison is remembered for his description of genius as "99% perspiration," Gianmni Bettini, one of his earliest competitors, exemplified that maxim. Apparently, Bettini was possessed of such an unyielding will that he could be considered obsessive. When an idea developed in his mind, he pursued it again and again. This pattern was not only reflected through his inventive genius, but also in his relationships with women.

In late 1882 or early 1883, Bettini took leave of absence from the Verona-based Third Savoy Cavalry and visited the United States, eventually taking up residence in New York City's posh Windsor Hotel. Generous, described by the May 19, 1883 edition of THE NEW YORK DAILY TRIBUNE as: "... an unusually handsome young man...," and very much the playboy, he soon became popular with the Windsor's guests and the members of Manhattan's Union Club, which he visited frequently.

Between partying and shopping sprees, Bettini quickly spent most of his savings, but not before he made a visit to Annapolis, Maryland and Fortress Monroe, Virginia. It was at Monroe that he met the beautiful Lesley Josephine Ayer (1855-1928), daughter of Dr. James Cook Ayer (1818-1878), founder of the famed Lowell, Massachusetts firm which manufactured pills and other health products. Although older than Bettini by some five years, Miss Ayer seemed to like him, and they remained acquainted with each other for several weeks.

In addition to living in Massachusetts, the Ayers had a luxurious townhouse at 5 West 57th Street in New York. The future inventor followed Lesley back to the city and visited her at that residence on several occasions. He did not immediately tell the young heiress that he had fallen passionately in love with her. Consequently, Lesley Ayer was more than a little surprised when Bettini suddenly implored her to be his wife. Already engaged to Commodore Frederick Pearson, a U.S. Navy hero of the Civil War and a man who bore a striking resemblance to Bettini, Miss Ayer turned down the abrupt proposal.

For several days in May of 1883, Bettini's friends were quite concerned about his severe depression and

talk of suicide. Late on the night of May 13th, the young lieutenant left the Windsor with a small 32 caliber pistol in his pocket, intent on killing himself on the threshold of Miss Ayer's house. Bettini fired a bullet into his chest and collapsed by the front door. Whether or not the Ayers were home remains a mystery, but a mutual friend from the Windsor, Mr. F. E. Trowbridge, had followed him. It was Trowbridge who managed to bet Bettini to St. Luke's Hospital, where he was initially thought to be mortally wounded. Bettini lingered, half-dead, with a bullet near his heart; it was never removed. He was given the Last Rites of the Church, and well-wishers (which did not include the Ayers) filled his room with flowers. Indeed, Frederick Ayer, Lesley's brother and scion of the Ayer business interests, spoke scornfully of the young man who had embarrassed his family.



Miraculously, Bettini recovered and was released from the hospital on May 21st or 22nd (the St. Luke's Medical Records Department no longer has documents going back to 1883). But he was promptly arrested for the crime of attempted suicide and arraigned before Justice Herrmann of Yorkville Police Court. In answer to the charge Bettini testified: "I don't know what I was doing when I shot myself, if I did shoot myself. I had no trouble of any kind. I am on a visit to this country and intend to return without delay." Justice Herrmann released him on \$1000.00 bond in the custody of the Duke of Casteluccia, an Italian diplomat. Two weeks later, Bettini returned to Italy and his regiment.

Of course, the story of Gianni Bettini in the United States did not end. About three years later he met Daisy Abbott (her legal name was Jeanie E. Abbott), the French-born socialite he followed to the United States and eventually married. The Bettinis lived but a few buildings away from the Ayer-Pearson mansion during the late Nineteenth Century. One can only hope that Bettini and Lesley Ayer-Pearson at least became friends, for surely, they must have seen each other again!

We would like to thank Janine Whitcomb of the Lowell Historical Society for helping us find a portrait of Lesley Ayer-Pearson. Thanks are also due Peter Betz, who sent Robert Feinstein 1883 newspaper clippings about the above, some twenty years ago.

Research for the biography of Gianni Bettini is in the final stage.

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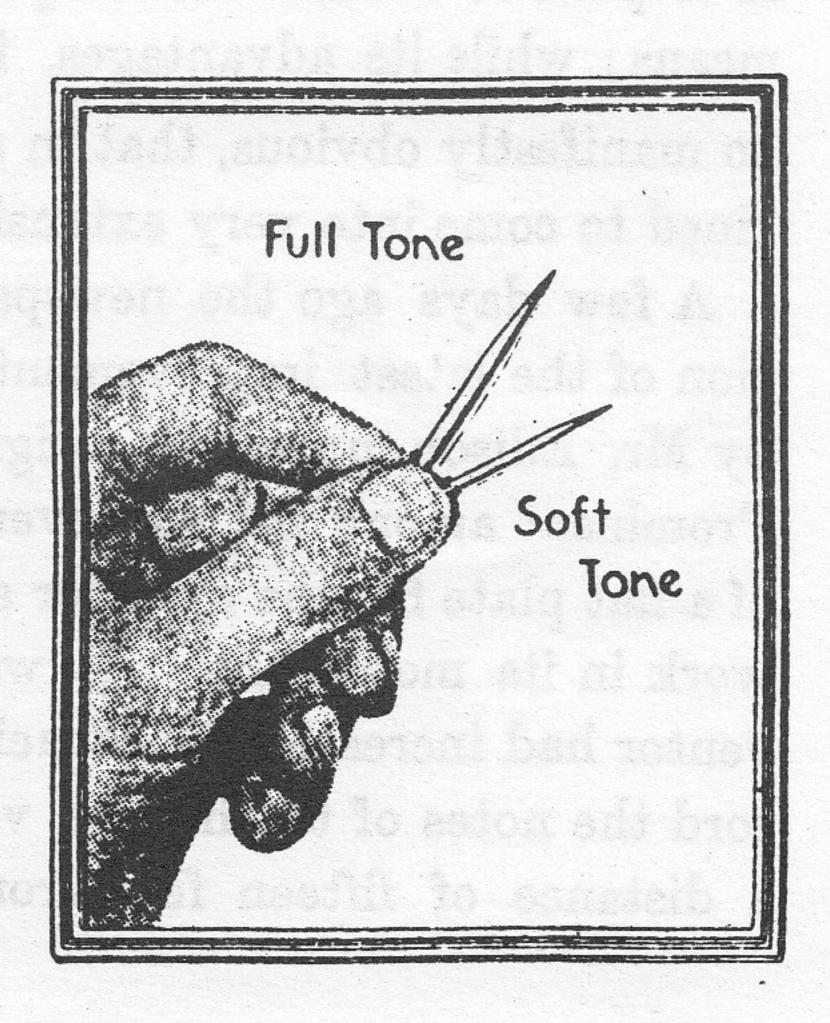
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## The "Auriphone"

The following article appeared in the 1879 book Science and Theology, just two years after Edison's invention of the Phonograph. It is interesting to note that Edison was already talking about *disc* records (albeit, still tinfoil!), as well as clock-work motors.

We thank Jerry Parker of Montreal for sharing this fascinating piece.

#### THE AURIPHONE

AND ITS FUTURE.

#### ANON.

R. THOMAS A. EDISON, the Napoleon of inventors, is now completing at his laboratory, in Menlo Park, New Jersey, an improvement upon the phonograph, which is calculated not only to astonish the world, but to almost revolutionize the accepted usages of society. Mr. Edison is not only inventive, but he is also industrious, and since the production of the phonograph, only a few weeks ago, has, without intermission, devoted himself to its further development. From day to day he has added improvements, until at last he seems to have reached the limits of perfection itself. His very latest achievement is a modification by which he literally gives to every wall its ear, and hereafter there can be no actual certainty of privacy in any conversation unless held in a desert, or through the medium of the deaf and dumb alphabet. The cost of the new machine is, moreover, so insignificant as to place it within reach of people of the most moderate means; while its advantages, in a protective sense, are so manifestly obvious, that in a very short time it is destined to come into very extensive, if not general use.

A few days ago the newspapers published a description of the latest improvements and modifications made by Mr. Edison upon the original or cylinder machine. Prominent among the improvements was the substitution of a flat plate for the cylinder and the utilization of clockwork in its movement. It was also stated that the inventor had increased its capacity so as to enable it to record the notes of the human voice in the tone uttered at a distance of fifteen feet from the instrument. Since

that time its capacity has been still further enlarged, until now the very faintest whisper uttered in a room where profound silence is otherwise maintained, can not only be recorded, but can also be repeated in any increased volume. In fact, to quote Mr. Edison, "A maiden's sigh can be given in the magnitude of an earthquake!"

The reasoning or inductive process by which Mr. Edison arrived at this marvellous development is seemingly so simple and natural as to commend itself to the most ordinary intellect. Indeed, he cannot describe it himself without smiling at its manifest and almost childlike simplicity, and though the inventor, he seems to marvel at the results achieved quite as much as the listener.

While Mr. Edison was testing one of his lately improved machines, his restless intellect conceived the possibility of making it record and speak simultaneously. To think with him is to act. To conceive a new problem is to set about its solution, which in this instance was soon accomplished. By the introduction of a second, or following needle, and diaphragm to the recording needle, and in close proximity, the one plate and its system of clock-work causes the machine to both record and talk almost simultaneously. In two days Mr. Edison had one in successful operation, and his fertile imagination was again wandering off into new fields of conquest.

Parties who have personally inspected and listened to the "Talking Machine" will recall to mind the metallic hoarseness of tone as well as slight falling off in volume of its utterances. Many attribute this to the use of a tin trumpet in delivering the sound, and experiment has since shown this supposition to have been correct. Long ago Mr. Edison had realized the necessity of utilizing some other and less defective medium, more sensitive, and less resonant in material and construction. After many failures he at last succeeded in supplying this want by constructing a delivery horn out of a new substance, compounded mainly of Catchouc gelatine and the sensitive carbon, which enters so largely into Mr. Edison's manufactures. A modification was also made on its shape and construction, more especially adapting it to the needed purposes. Upon the very first time it was found to be almost perfect in action, repeating the voice with such absolute fidelity in tone and inflection as to actually startle the experimenters themselves. At another time, while again testing its merits, the tube portion of the trumpet accidentally became twisted, when the ever-watchful ear of the inventor at once detected an increase of volume of sound. His attention was then directed to the economy of the convolution of the human ear, and the problem presented itself as to whether they do not embody a mechanical

principle. It was not long before this secret yielded itself to the prying search of the wonderful inventor, who discovered that by curling the neck or pipe of the trumpet in a peculiar way, and by adding to its convolutions, the faintest sound-wave could be made to recall itself through the medium of the diaphragm, upon the receptive plate or matrix, as deeply as the loudest tone uttered under ordinary conditions. In short, he succeeded in demonstrating the fact absolutely that by means of proper mechanical arrangements the volume of sound capable of being emitted by the phonograph was actually limitless, and entirely independent of the application of steam, air, valves or any extraneous force.

Impressed with the value of both these discoveries, it was natural in Mr. Edison to set about combining the two, a result he accomplished with little difficulty, the operation of which is to be witnessed at his laboratory in Menlo Park, and which he has named the "Auriphone."

This new invention of Edison's is briefly described as follows: In the ceiling of his private office, concealed from view, with the exception of a small, ear-shaped funnel, of dark colour, he has fitted between the rafters and the floor above, one of his double-recording and speaking machines. In the room above a portion of the machine rises through the floor, and attached to it is a small wooden box, said to contain the coils of the pipe of the trumpet, the bell or mouth of which opens through one side, and is made of the new substance discovered by Mr. Edison, and alluded to elsewhere. With the exception of the box, all other portions of the machine are open to inspection. Every word uttered in the room below is repeated in the room above, with about treble or quadruple the volume of sound (although it can be arranged in vast excess of this). While at the same time it is being recorded on the matrix-plate for future reference and preservation through the electrotyping process. The effect produced by the auriphone is not only comically weird, but, in many ways, alarming. Sending an assistant to the room below in order to test its capacity for catching whispers, the orator, directed by Mr. Edison, bent down his ear to the little box only to be deafened by the inquiry, "What do you think of the auriphone?" shouted in tones that almost made the house rock, followed by a laugh so mockingly hideous and unearthly as to make the blood curdle with horror. This we soon discovered to be one of the peculiar jokes incidental to an introduction to the auriphone, always hugely enjoyed by the inventor and his attaches. Subsequent experiments proved the exquisite sensitiveness of the machine. The faintest whisper, the ticking of a clock, the rolling of a lead-pencil

over the desk, the tearing of a small piece of newspaper, a sigh, a tune hummed in the lowest register—all were successively delivered in the room above in exaggerated volume. At night, when the quiet is more profound, Mr. Edison informed us that he could plainly hear the purring of his cat in the office below.

The effects to be produced by the introduction of the Auriphone will be wonderful. When all walls have ears, literally, what is to become of our confidences? With the spy ever in wait for us, not only to repeat them, but to also manufacture their indisputable proof for transmission and preservation, what are we to do? Will society become thoroughly honest, virtuous, and good? or will it be torn asunder by dissension and relegated to savagery? When a man's sons are popping up in judgment at all times and places; when man is forced to go through the world with a window, as it were, in his bosom, will it longer be a pleasant or even an endurable place to live in? And yet to face this actual contingency we are brought by Mr. Edison and his new Auriphone.

The subject for contemplation is so entirely new and so absolutely startling in its nature, that we may well shrink from considering its more serious aspects, in view of its almost boundless possibilities and results. But there is, happily, no shade without sunshine, and it is not without its comical though not less vexatious sides. Fifty or sixty dollars at most, Mr. Edison informed us, would cover the expense of placing one of these machines, or mechanical ears, in the ceiling of any room, so nicely concealed as to escape observation, and capable of being so nicely adjusted that "the dropping of a pin upon the carpeted floor could be heard in the room above." Just think of Paterfamilias upstairs with such a trap set, while Anastatia and Alphonso are cooing in the parlour below! Keeping tally of the sighs and weighing the intensity of each caress, and all this with two turtle-doves in blissful ignorance of any supervision. Think of the gay deceiver in a breach of promise case suddenly confronted in court with half-a-dozen witnesses, who, though absent personally, heard the desired proposal, each armed with a stereotyped plate upon which every row, every murmur, every "swish" of the embezzled kisses is indelibly stamped! Think of Old Bullion's clerks and Mrs. Clearside's servants under the espionage of the mechanical ear! Indeed, it looks now as though people will soon have to regret Mr. Edison's birth having taken place at so late a period in history, and that they will be apt to grow much more charitable toward those sensible old ancestors who always had a stake or a chop ready for people who knew too much.

#### OBITUARIES

### Donald Mills, Last of the Singing Mills Brothers, Dies at 84

By ANTHONY RAMIREZ

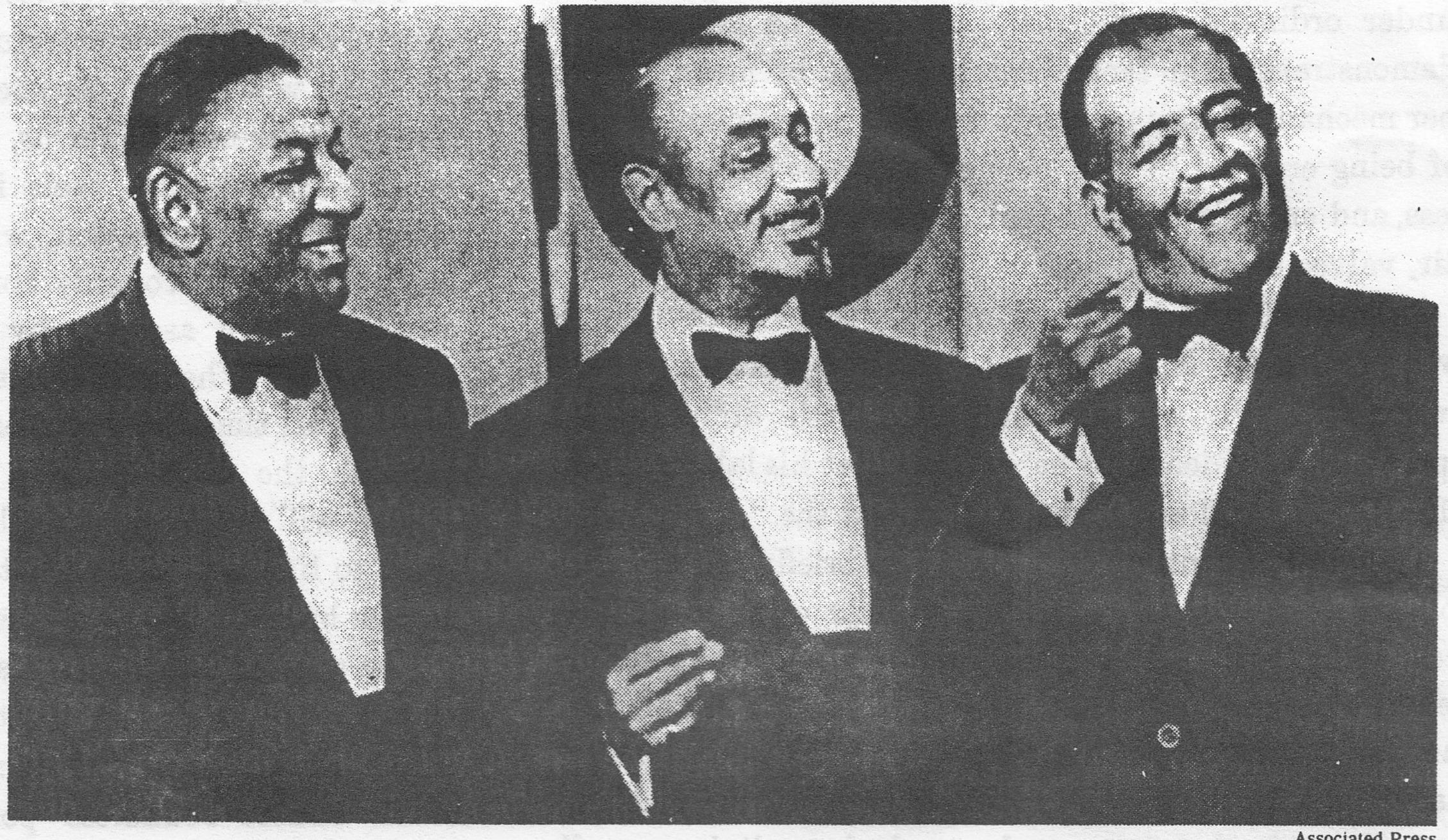
Donald Mills, the last surviving member of the singing group the Mills Brothers, whose serene harmo-,ny and playful wit in songs like "Up a Lazy River" and "Glow Worm" entertained audiences over six decades, died Saturday. He was 84.

Mr. Mills had been performing as recently as April, with his son John Mills II in Palm Springs, Calif., when he underwent brain surgery for cerebral swelling. He fought pneumonia on and off after the brain surgery, and died of complications from pneumonia at Cedars Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles, said Bernard J. Roswig, their publicist and a family friend.

The Mills Brothers' popularity, versatility and influence were unusual in an era when black performers, like themselves, were segregated from whites. Yet their affability and musicianship made them one of the most influential singing groups in the country, winning admirers like Bing Crosby, Mel Tormé and Dean Martin.

With 2,246 recordings made by 1981, their last year performing together, the Mills Brothers may have recorded more songs than anyone else. They have been awarded 36 gold records, for million sellers, and sold more than 50 million records. Their songs, with their smooth and tight harmony, are favorites of barbershop quartets.

Mills Brothers songs constitute a virtual time capsule of the pre-rock era. Their first big hit was "Tiger Rag" in 1932, in which they imitated instruments like the trombone and



**Associated Press** 

The Mills Brothers - from left, Herbert, Donald and Harry - in 1977. Donald died on Saturday.

trumpet, and was followed by such continued to perform with his broth-"You're Nobody's Sweetheart Now," "Sweet Sue," "Bye, Bye Blackbird," "You Always Hurt the One You Love," "Yellow Bird," "Cab Driver" "Up a Lazy River," as well as "Paper Doll," a song that led to a string of Top 10 hits in the 1950's.

For much of their time together, they weren't all brothers. Their father, John Sr., replaced his son John Charles, who died in 1936. Donald

standards as "Goodbye Blues," ers as a trio after their father died. Harry Mills died in 1982, and his brother Herbert died in 1988.

> Harry Mills, often the spokesman for the group, once described the group's beginnings: "When we started out in 1925, we were billed as Four Boys and a Guitar. We were a novelty quartet whose forte was to imitate instruments with our voices." The boys ranged in age from 11 to 15.

Donald Mills was born April 29,

1915, in Piquea, Ohio, to John Sr., a professional singer, and Eathel, a music teacher and light-opera sing-

Donald Mills's wife, Sylvia, died in 1988. In addition to his son John of Los Angeles, he is survived by five other children: Naola Summers of Colton, Calif.; Deidra M. Raney of Bellefontaine, Ohio; Donald F. Mills Jr., Alan H. Mills and Melody M. Mills of Los Angeles; 21 grandchildren and 18 great-grandchildren.

The Mills Brothers began MADE IN U.S. A .. U.S. PAT. 1.637,544 Radid with Fana Jan. Radio, Records No musical inmachanical devices user, on this recording other MADE IN U.S.A. U.S. PAT. 1.637.544
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their commercial recording career with Brunswick late in 1931. After a little more than two dozen titles, they were lured to the newlyformed American Decca label in 1934 – presumably a lucrative arrangement for all parties concerned!



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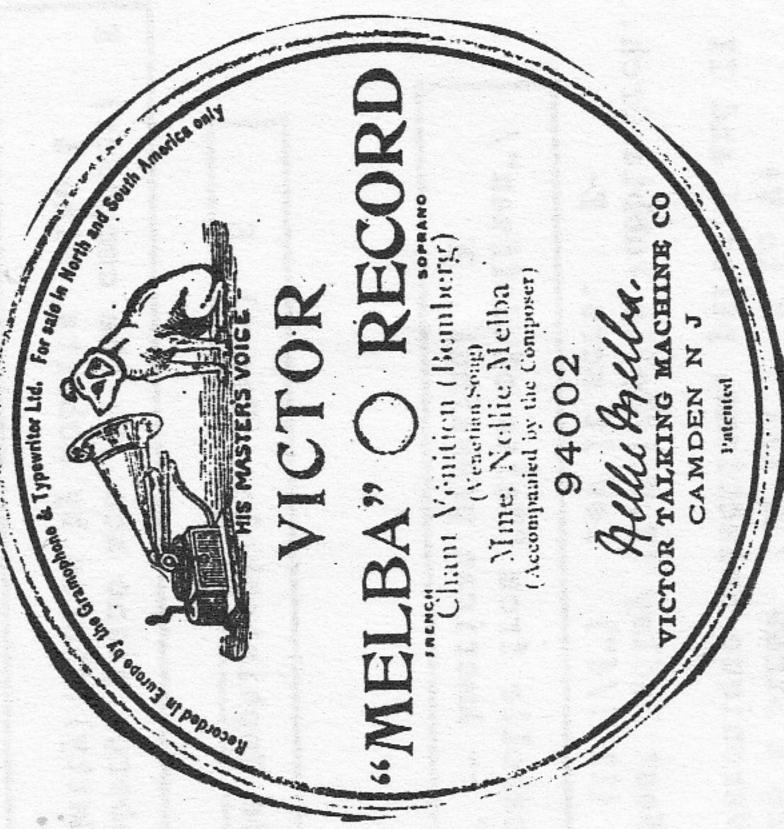
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